

deaths due to abortion were reported per year. Beginning in 1973, the number of abortion-related fatalities decreased markedly. From 1973 to 1987 the average number of abortion-related fatalities declined to about 0.5 per year. Of the 60 abortion deaths reported during the 25-year study period, 53 (88.3 percent) occurred during the 10 years prior to 1973, while only seven (11.7 percent) occurred in the 15 years since.

Comparing the two time periods 1963-67 and 1968-72, the maternal mortality ratio for all causes of death excluding abortion declined 34.5 percent (from 36.5 to 23.9 per 100,000), while the mortality ratio for deaths due to abortion increased 50.0 percent (from 4.4 to 6.6 per 100,000) (see table). During the next two time intervals, from 1968-72 to 1973-77, the mortality ratio for abortion-related deaths declined 84.8 percent (from 6.6 to 1.0 per 100,000), compared to a 27.6 percent decrease in deaths due to other obstetric causes. During this period, the overall maternal mortality ratio declined 40 percent, from 30.5 to 18.3; 45.9 percent of this decrease was due to

a decline in abortion deaths, with the remainder due to a decrease in deaths from other obstetric complications. Between the years 1963 and 1972, abortion deaths accounted for 15.3 percent of all pregnancy-related fatalities, compared with only 4.7 percent of such deaths that occurred from 1973 to 1987. In 1978-82, the mortality ratio due to complications of abortion declined to 0.7 per 100,000 births. During 1983-87 there were no reported abortion-related deaths in the state. For all other causes of maternal death, after 1977, the mortality ratio essentially leveled off at about eight per 100,000 births (Figure 2).

Considering the entire ten-year period 1963-1972, the maternal mortality ratio for abortion deaths was 5.5 per 100,000 births. Had this mortality ratio remained the same throughout the entire study period, 70 abortion-related deaths would have been expected between 1973-1987, or ten times the number that were reported ($p < 0.00001$, based on Poisson probability). For all other causes of death, the improvement in maternal mortality from 1963-72 to 1973-87

Figure 2. Cause-Specific Maternal Mortality,
NC Residents, 1963-67 Through 1983-87

